

The East of England Plan

In just three weeks' time, the Secretary of State for the Department of Communities and Local Government will probably approve the East of England Plan. 'That won't affect us', will be your comment but, in truth it will affect us all, since this, the first plan produced by the newly-formed Regions will be the blue print for those soon to follow in other regions on England.

The East of England does not lie quietly consisting, as it does, of the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. How can a 'one-size-fits-all' plan possibly be produced for such a disparate collection of towns, villages and countryside? The plan appears to be predicated on economic growth across the region: "This is the region closest to Europe therefore more jobs need to be created to keep the economy of the U.K. on an upward curve", says the Government Office for the region, GO-EAST. "We have done our research and this is the prediction. We are proud of the Plan; it is fundamentally sound."

But is it? Of course, if there are going to be more jobs created then there must be a massive house-building project. Throughout Hertfordshire there will be a 20% increase in housing in twenty years above the 2001 level and in the south of the county, nearest to London, this rises to a 25% increase. Five houses for every four! "No problem with finding somewhere to put them, we'll just tag them on to those New Towns of Hemel Hempstead, Welwyn Garden City, Harlow and Stevenage; we can say that these extra houses will regenerate the town centres!" Or perhaps they will be useful for the people who are commuting to London?

Wait a minute, please. As one of the driest areas of the U.K., Hertfordshire has been subject to a hosepipe ban for the last six months. Won't all those extra houses make things worse? "Oh no", say GO-EAST, "we are going to ensure that the occupants of the new houses use less water than is being used at present." But what about the increased traffic that will come from building all those houses on the outskirts of these towns? "No problem again, we are going to encourage everyone to walk to work or use bicycles or use public transport." Right....! There must be a great amount of money being put into upgrading the present public transport system then; it's just about at capacity right now. "Oh, no! the Government doesn't have any money, we are going to try to raise this from other sources." And of course, this is only part of the infrastructure that will be affected. Where is the money to pay for hospitals and schools, for increased sewage capacity, etc. etc?

And so we come to the actual siting of the new houses, flats, etc. At present there is no land available, it has all been developed. The only way that land can be found is to raid the Green Belt which has done an excellent job of preventing coalescence of out towns and villages. "What's the problem," says GO-EAST, "we are giving you MORE Green Belt land but it will be further away from London; you will just have to use you cars to get to it! Oh, and don't forget that there will probably be another runway at Stansted, that will

increase the traffic across your County and do wonders for the level of pollution.”

The Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils is extremely concerned about this plan. Whilst GO-EAST says they are proud of the Plan and that it is fundamentally sound, HAPTC contend that it is fundamentally flawed and that the communities it envisages are unsustainable. Remember that this is the first such plan and if accepted will be the model for others around the country. Which is why it affects you.